

Golding and nietzsche: compared and contrasted

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Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher, and William Golding, an English author, lived and died in two seemingly separate worlds. They came from different time periods, places of origin, and had perceptions of humanity that draw no mass comparison. Golding, best known for his novel entitled *Lord of the Flies*, tells the story of a group of English schoolboys left on a deserted island all to their own devices. Conversely, Nietzsche is perhaps best known for his controversial aphorism proclaiming the “death of God”. However different they may be, with a closer look, we discover that Golding’s “*Flies*” really do fly over Nietzsche’s philosophies. Golding’s insights into humanity as presented in the characters and events of *Lord of the Flies*, parallel and contrast those of Nietzsche’s philosophies, including the Will to Power, master morality versus slave morality, and man’s strides towards the *Übermensch*. The first parallel found in Golding and Nietzsche’s perspectives on humanity is between the social structure on the island and Nietzsche’s concepts of master morality and slave morality. Nietzsche’s notion of a master morality and a slave morality is an attempt to explain human perception of right and wrong. Master morality is an attitude where “good” and “bad” are respectively replaced by “noble” and “contemptible”. In this way of thinking, the master chooses to leave behind traditional moral codes. They create their own morality. Conversely, in slave morality, slaves make villains out of the masters. This moral outlook values only that which is convenient and beneficial to the weak and powerless. Strong and independent individuals are considered evil.

In the context of the island, this conflicting set of moral outlooks mirrors the conflict that brews in their society. The most obvious example of master

morality being put into practice is in Jack and his character development. Throughout the course of the novel, Jack evolves into this “master” persona. In the beginning, Jack is a schoolboy whose true primal urges are kept simmering under the surface. As his stay on the island progresses, the old restrictive forces of civilization are lost on him and he is liberated from expected codes of behavior. This liberation might be described by Nietzsche as the transition from a member of the “herd” to the “Übermensch”, or “overman”. This overman, as described by Nietzsche, is someone who is not restricted by slave morality. He, like Jack, is unburdened by various “Thou shalt’s” and is the creator of his own values. Nietzsche says, “the ladder on which [the overman] ascends and descends is tremendous; he has seen further, willed further, been capable further than any other human being” (760). In contrast, the rest of the boys, by Nietzsche’s standards, do not live fully actualized lives. They live within the bounds of their old values. Furthermore, for many of these boys, falling into a position of subservience seems a natural way of doing things. Jack, on the other hand, who goes on to create his own code of conduct, is unable to function under the control of someone else. This is where conflict on the island spawns. Because the followers of both moralities seek to impose their values onto each other, coexistence is impossible. This principle, concocted by Nietzsche, is reflected heavily throughout Golding’s novel.

A second parallel between Golding and Nietzsche’s insights presents itself in a close correlation between Jack and a major theme throughout Nietzsche’s writing. The primal nature of Jack’s character and his ascension to a position of power are a direct illustration of Nietzsche’s doctrine of the Will to Power.

This concept is one that grounded Nietzsche's entire world view. The idea, in essence, is that everything a living entity does is its will to power. Every action towards someone else is driven psychologically by a deep-down desire to exert one's will over others. This presupposition stipulates that, in the context of *Lord of the Flies*, everything Jack does, he does to bring the other boys under his will in one way or another. Whether he was dominating the choirboys with a militaristic attitude, creating rules so that he could punish those who break them, or physically harming someone, Jack repeatedly exerts his will over what he perceives to be his and eventually gains a position of authority on the island. Jack's tendency towards these behaviors becomes apparent when he loses the election as chief to Ralph.

In accordance to what Nietzsche might call his "master morality", he is mortified and angered by this loss and begins to continually challenge Ralph's authority and the symbols of civilization carried over on the island. Jack declares, "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong- we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down!" (Golding 100). As a true "master", Jack creates his own values, and answers not to the established and restrictive code of conduct but to his own drives and impulses. Nietzsche states, "My idea is that every specific body strives to become master and to extend its force and to thrust back all that resists its extension" (636). Jack's character development where we are introduced to an insecure, repressed schoolboy who lets go of his morals to become a fierce and powerful leader is the will to power put into practice to the nth degree. This correlation in thought proves that Golding and Nietzsche share a similar outlook on the type of person who

naturally gravitates towards leadership, with these similarities come contrasts.

Firstly, although Golding and Nietzsche seem to agree on the notion that a charismatic, domineering personality like Jack would be naturally inclined towards an authoritative position, what Golding suggests by this turn of events and how Nietzsche would likely perceive it presents a vast difference in opinion. All higher civilizations, according to Nietzsche, arose from barbarians who preyed upon weaker, moral, and more peaceful societies around them. According to this notion, immorality is the hallmark of a healthy society in the sense that society does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the superior individual.

Nietzsche's philosophy suggests that without a character like Jack exerting his will to power, a truly enlightened society on the island would never come to be, even if that "higher" society comes at the expense of a peaceful one. While Nietzsche may have looked upon someone like Jack in a position of power approvingly, Golding marks Jack's rise to leadership as the onset of death and chaos. This is where Golding's bias against Jack is shown. Once Jack is in power, the old symbols of society cease to be of importance. The conch is subsequently smashed and the glasses are broken. With the boys metaphorically blinded, Simon is viciously murdered and Piggy is crushed by a boulder. The four sparks of civilization that once promised peace and order are snuffed out. In contrast to how Nietzsche may see Jack, he is frequently referred to as a savage by Golding through the other boys. This difference in

opinion between Golding and Nietzsche shows that their ideas surrounding power in society were not perfectly aligned.

Simon represents spirituality on the island in the sense that he has a connection with nature and a heightened perception of what goes on around him. He is the only one who seems to understand life on the island for what it really is. Simon recognizes that the beast is only a manifestation of the boy's fear of the unknown, as he says, "...maybe it's only us" (Golding 97). These visionary qualities that the other boys do not possess make him an outsider. Simon, unlike Ralph and Jack, can neither organize nor inspire awe in the rest of the boys. He is not a leader and imposes his will on no one. While Ralph led the group on the basis of logic and rationality, and Jack on the basis of fear and awe, Simon sank into the background altogether. His meek nature falls short of Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, who "[ascends] to the rank of the highest type... the type of man that is strong and sure of life" (Nietzsche 786). Simon is far from Nietzsche's overman. Although Simon is illustrated by Golding as a kind of mystic who is the only one able to see the truth, he is unable to effectively communicate these truths to the other boys.

Nietzsche has asserted that it is not enough to simply prove something, and that "one also has to seduce or elevate people to it. That is why the man of knowledge should learn to speak his wisdom" (330). Simon, although presented by Golding as the only real seer on the island, would not likely be Nietzsche's idea of the ideal man. This is another example of how their insights into humanity differ slightly. At a first glance, it may seem obscure

to compare Golding to Nietzsche. Although their works differed vastly, even the smallest of investigations into their insights yields many similarities. When it comes to their perceptions of human nature, they seem to share many common ideas and messages. Although both men have passed away, the messages conveyed through their work have lived on. A lasting legacy is something both Golding and Nietzsche left behind. Above all else, they have that in common.